Israel to Allow ICC Visit on Gaza War Mission

September 2, 2016

By AFP

The Times of Israel

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-to-allow-icc-visit-on-gaza-war-mission/>

Israel is to host a working group of the International Criminal Court as it weighs whether to probe alleged war crimes in the 2014 Gaza war with Hamas, an Israeli official said Friday.

The group’s arrival “shortly” will be unprecedented, he told AFP on condition of anonymity, saying the visit was intended to show the ICC team “how the Israeli judicial system works.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s spokesman declined to comment on the trip, which comes at the request of ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda.

Under its statutes, the ICC must be satisfied that the state in question is unable or unwilling to pursue the matter itself before the court opens war crimes proceedings.

Israel will seek to convince the visiting ICC team that it intends to see justice done over accusations it used excessive force in the July-August 2014 war in and around the Palestinian territory and events immediately preceding it.

The official could not say if the group would be given access to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, to which Israel controls all passage except across the largely closed Gaza-Egypt border.

The UN and Palestinians say 2,251 Palestinians, including 551 children, died in the 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza’s Islamist rulers Hamas. Israel, for its part, has said that up to half of those killed on the Palestinian side were combatants, and has blamed the civilian death toll on Hamas for deliberating placing rocket launchers, tunnels and other military installations among civilians.

On the Israeli side, 73 people were killed, mostly soldiers.

Israel and the Palestinians have accused each other of war crimes.

Israel is alleged to have used force indiscriminately, while Hamas is accused of firing rockets at Israeli civilian population centers and of using Palestinians as human shields.

The Palestinians formally asked the ICC last year to investigate the Jewish state, which has not signed up to the ICC, for alleged war crimes.

Israel vehemently opposes any ICC investigation but officials have said they will cooperate with the body to convince it of the competence of the state’s own courts.